Agenda Topic: **Alternate Assessment Policy**

Materials:
- Proposed Alternate Assessment Policy Statement
- Status of Alternate Assessment Development: A State-by-State Comparison (under separate cover)

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**Purpose of Agenda Item**

To establish a Board policy on the state alternate assessment.

**Expected Outcome(s) of Agenda Item**

The Board will adopt a policy addressing the Illinois Alternate Assessment.

**Background Information**

At the December State Board meeting, a detailed presentation was provided to update the Board on activities conducted to ensure Illinois’ compliance with 34 CFR 300.137-139, which outlines requirements on the assessment of students with disabilities. The presentation focused on the development and implementation of the Illinois Alternate Assessment (IAA). One of the next steps identified at that time was the development of a policy statement on alternate assessment for consideration and adoption by the State Board at its January meeting.

**Legal Foundation for the IAA**

Public Law 105-17, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA ‘97), requires all state and local education agencies to develop and conduct appropriate state and district alternate assessments for those students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) whose disabilities preclude them from participating in regular state or district-wide assessments, even with accommodations. According to IDEA ‘97 and guidance provided by the Office of Special Education Programs, it is the responsibility of the state education agency to develop an alternate assessment for any large-scale state assessment that it conducts. Illinois has met this requirement by developing the IAA.
Development and Implementation of the IAA

Development of the IAA was guided by the Illinois Alternate Assessment Task Force, ISBE staff, and the ISBE contractor Measured Progress. Thus, the IAA reflects the input and expertise of a wide range of individuals and has been designed to facilitate the meaningful assessment of students. Once developed, the IAA was piloted during the spring of 2000, and the input of teachers participating in the pilot was used to revise the IAA and related materials prior to implementation.

To prepare educators to implement the IAA, 22 different training sessions were conducted statewide from September through December 2000. Over 3,000 educators and administrators attended these sessions. Statewide implementation of the IAA began in the late fall of the current school year, and portfolios are to be completed by April 15, 2001. To support teachers in conducting the IAA, follow-up training sessions have begun and are designed to provide teachers an opportunity to ask questions and gain further guidance on the portfolio process and other aspects of the IAA.

IAA Design and Rationale

There are several key characteristics of the IAA. Specifically, the IAA:

- Is aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards, just as the regular state assessment is;
- Is a multi-disciplinary approach to assessment of student learning, access to and progress toward the state standards, and opportunities to learn;
- Is designed in a portfolio format that will be assembled for individual students across the school year; and
- Involves authentic assessments composed of a variety of performance assessment instruments that require the student to generate, rather than choose a response.

It is important to note that the IAA has been designed to be an integral part of the instructional process, rather than an additional process. Thus, collecting evidence of student progress for the IAA portfolio is intended to be ongoing across the year. As students complete work resulting from instruction aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards (which should serve as the foundation for all instruction and assessment), this work can be collected as evidence of student progress to be included in the portfolio. Further, when students' IEPs are aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards, evidence used to measure and demonstrate progress toward IEP goals and objectives can also be used as a component of the IAA portfolio. In fact, teachers are encouraged to do so.

The scoring criteria for the IAA are divided into two primary components: student progress and program opportunities. For students who have disabilities that necessitate their participation in an alternate assessment, program opportunities play a significant role in their access to and progress toward the Illinois Learning Standards. Therefore,
the program opportunities component of the IAA is critical to the comprehensive assessment of student progress. The rationale for including this component is founded on the fact that the ultimate purpose of assessment is accountability, in that student performance results are used to hold schools accountable for appropriately educating students. Although the regular state assessment does not have a separate program evaluation component, student results are ultimately used to evaluate the effectiveness of a school’s/district’s program(s). As designed, the IAA facilitates such an evaluation.

Some individuals in the field have questioned the rationale for the IAA serving as the only option for the state alternate assessment. Because Illinois’ assessment system is designed to measure a student’s progress toward the Illinois Learning Standards and in turn compare his/her progress with that of other students across the state, it is critical that the state alternate assessment allow such a comparison for the performance of students with IEPs whose disabilities preclude them from participating in the regular state assessment. Thus, it is necessary to have one common alternate assessment that is used statewide.

Continual Improvement of the IAA

As stated above, implementation of the IAA is underway. This implementation does not preclude refinements being made. In fact, we expect to make continual improvements in the first few years. To that end, we look forward to working with the field to identify and carry out needed improvements for the 2001-02 assessment.

The first step in this process has already occurred through the convening of the Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee in December. At the December meeting, the committee identified seven needs pertaining to the IAA. Below is a list of those needs and solutions implemented to date to address them.

1. **There is a need to define the purpose of assessment: Does it evaluate educational programs or student performance?**  
   *Solution(s) to date:* Arrangements have been made to have Ed Roeber of Measured Progress, the IAA contractor, attend the next meeting of the Ad-Hoc Committee to address this issue from the perspective of the IAA. Agency staff are also developing an alternate assessment guidelines document that will include information on this topic.

2. **There is a need to demonstrate how the IAA components are directly related to the IEP.**  
   *Solution(s) to date:* Measured Progress has been asked to incorporate information into the follow-up training sessions that demonstrates and reinforces the connection of the IEP and the IAA. The alternate assessment guidelines document referenced above will also include such information.

3. **There is a need to establish the validity of the IAA portfolio.**  
   *Solution(s) to date:* The IAA is aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards; thus, the results will reveal how well students involved in the alternate assessment are
progressing toward the standards. Implementation of the IAA has begun and its validity will be established over time.

4. **There is a need to address the assessment of “gray area” students, for whom neither the regular assessment nor the alternate assessment may be appropriate.**
   
   **Solution(s) to date:** Staff in Special Education and Standards, Assessment and Accountability have met to discuss options for the 2001-02 school year. Work will continue on this issue.

5. **There is a need to clarify how student results on the IAA will be reported.**
   
   **Solution(s) to date:** Staff in Standards, Assessment and Accountability, Special Education, and Research will be meeting in January to address this issue. Measured Progress has developed a preliminary format for individual student reporting that will be reviewed at that meeting.

6. **There is a need for further professional development to increase the ability of teachers to implement the IAA and understand its connection to instructional practice anchored in the Illinois Learning Standards and to the IEP.**
   
   **Solution(s) to date:** Follow-up sessions are being conducted to provide further clarification of the IAA process. Plans are being developed for a satellite conference on the IAA.

7. **There is a need to determine the impact that policies related to the administration of and student participation in the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) may have on the appropriate assessment of students with disabilities.**
   
   **Solution(s) to date:** Staff in Special Education and Standards, Assessment and Accountability have held two meetings to discuss options for the 2000-01 and 2001-02 school years. ACT has also been contacted regarding this issue.

An additional solution implemented to date relates to a concern that the IAA will create increased paperwork for teachers. To help alleviate this concern, for the 2000-01 IAA administration teachers have been given the option of collecting only two pieces of evidence per standard set instead of three to five pieces at those grade levels where the ISAT is administered. For eleventh graders participating in the IAA, this requirement has been reduced to only one piece of evidence per standard set.

Future steps to continually improve the IAA include continued solicitation of input from teachers implementing the assessment. The Ad-Hoc Committee will also be reconvened on January 24 to continue discussion of the seven needs outlined above and identify workable solutions in addition to those implemented to date.

Overall, we believe that the IAA is well designed and will result in the appropriate assessment of students with disabilities. Illinois is a leader in the nation in terms of having a comprehensive alternate assessment and is one of 26 states using a portfolio format. The continued support of the State Board of Education for the IAA will be demonstrated through the adoption of the policy statement.
Rationale for the Policy Statement

The policy statement is designed to clearly communicate the State Board’s support of the Illinois Alternate Assessment as an appropriate means of ensuring all students with disabilities are included in the state assessment and accountability system. There have been numerous questions from the field regarding the obligation of districts to conduct the IAA, and this policy will provide a clear direction on that issue to facilitate statewide implementation of the IAA and, consequently, Illinois’ compliance with IDEA ‘97.

Analysis and Implications for Policy, Budget, Legislative Action and Communications

Communication with the field is critical to the successful implementation of the IAA. The continued involvement of the Communications Office in reviewing and finalizing guidance documents will facilitate their timely distribution to the field. It is also important that the agency provide a consistent message on the IAA.

Superintendent’s Recommendation

It is recommended that the State Board adopt the policy on alternate assessment.

Next Steps

- Continue to work with the field to address issues pertaining to the implementation of the IAA, including the following:
  - Continuation of follow-up training sessions to support teachers currently conducting the IAA,
  - Identification of additional training needs of the field,
  - Reconvening the Ad-Hoc Committee within the month to continue the discussion of issues pertaining to the IAA and identification of workable solutions, and
  - Making refinements in the IAA based on the first year of implementation and feedback from teachers, administrators, and parents.
- Finalize and disseminate the guidance and question and answer documents to the field to provide clarification of the IAA and overall requirements for including students with disabilities in state and local assessments.